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The Folklore Muse

Frank de Caro

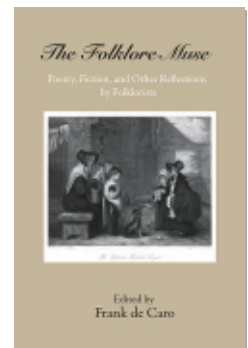
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Children's Lore and Language

Although children obviously belong to larger cultural groups, folklorists have long recognized that kids are also their own folk group with their own lore. William Wells Newell saw that in the 19th century when he published his classic *Games and Songs of American Children*, as did Alice Berthe Gomme with her similar work in England; and more recently *The Lore and Language of School Children* by Iona and Peter Opie has been widely recognized.⁷ Children's play and traditional games obviously have an attraction (perhaps it is in part the charm of childhood itself) that translates not only into research but into creative approaches to traditional play, games, and children's cultures.

Here Susan Stewart's poems, though they are multifaceted and intricate works, play off the playful traditions of Tag, Red Rover, and hand-shadows and suggest, at least indirectly, something about the nature of children's traditional games (the poems are, in fact, from a series called "Children's Games"; a number of the poems from this series have appeared in the *American Poetry Review*). Steve Zeitlin's poems range across a swath of childhood. "Folksay" (a title borrowed from folklorist and anthologist Benjamin Botkin) and "The Tenderness of Swine" deal with family, notably children's, expressions, while "The Lulu Bird Nestles in the Daddy O Tree" is about a father playing with his child (perhaps not a traditional game, though within families forms of play may become traditions unto themselves). In an earlier section, Zeitlin's "Julia" concerns a collector of children's folklore as it evokes the lyrics of lullabies. Fantasy literature has adult, adolescent, and childhood appeals and aspects, and Neil Grobman intended his novel *Lost in Redskirt Forest* to be enjoyed by readers of all ages. Yet the youth of his characters and some of the folklore he works into the novel certainly make it appealing to younger readers and highlight elements of childhood. Grobman notes that he pays homage to two well-known fantasy writers, James Barrie of Peter Pan fame and J. R. R. Tolkien, who liberally used Scandinavian mythology in his work, by naming a character here Barrie, the toll king. (Folklorists may also find the reference intended to American folklore scholar Barre Toelken.)

Susan Stewart

my mother's garden

I lost my copper key
in my mother's garden

I lost my silver knife
staring at a cloud

I found my wooden boat
hiding in the rushes

I found my wishing stone
hiding in my shoe

I lost my copper key
hiding in the rushes

I found my wooden boat
staring at a cloud

I lost my memory
when I learned to whistle

If you find my silver knife
hide it in a stone

arrowhead

Perfect flint,
we pried you up
out of the clod when
we built a hut
or dug for potatoes
at the end of summer.
You were not a fossil
leaf or chip
of bark, or what
we thought,
but part of a world
drawn from rock with rock—

sharp enough to
penetrate
fur, or hide
or hated flesh, and
pin it
back to earth.

Power pulses,
radiant, in and
out, out and through
the very grain
of you: from what's
persisting there
unyielding—one
small cliff-
fall backing into
another, an exposed
spine like a
hinge sloping
down to an
abyss.

Time has been honed
by a chisel
made of
chisel, pure time
aboriginal
and vanished.

*What are we doing,
where are we going,
with not a thing to
our name
the weight of this?*

shadowplay

I made a fist
and it grew two ears,

long ears with
a mumbling

mouth. Then
I opened my hand—

it grew
four feathers

and another hand
rose to meet it,

and two
thumbs made

a doubled
dove's beak,

curving and
nodding on

the windless
white; one four-

fingered wing
swinging out,

the other
feathering in—

black birds of my
bedroom wall

black birds
flying faster

than the arc
of headlights

emerging
from the road

beyond the
window, looming

and emptying
looming then

emptying
then looming

then emptying
the room of light.

tag

Before you touch me,
I will run.
If I touch you, you
must stop.
If I lose you, we
must stop
and run on
as two
forever.
Try to touch the larch's
bark,
try to call it
home.
If you go beyond
the grass,
you'll have no
voice,
you'll have
no one.
Beyond the grass
time stops —
try to touch
the larch's
bark,
try to
touch me,
we can stop,
we can try
to call it home.

red rover

red rover, red rover, why can't
you come over?
Toward morning, toward evening,
why not let go—
and come over, come
over, why can't you
come over? Red rover, red
rover, decider, permitter,
red rover, red rover,
why won't you let go?

Steve Zeitlin

The Lulu Bird Nestles in the Daddy O Tree

After all those Lulu lifts,
twisting the child through his legs like a pretzel
playing Daddy O and Monkey in a Tree

the sapling saps her father's strength.
Lulu grows stronger
as he loses strength,

until the tree is bent
from bending over
and father can't lift his tired limbs

Folksay

I am from
"Yo Sire"
and "Jumping off the fifteenth-story window for a breeze on a hot
day"
from "Tell Ma the boat floats"
to "Too tired to tuck"
from a long story tucked into a family expression
where to sing the hundredth psalm
means to fetch a glass of water
from the movies we internalized—
"You were expecting something a little more grand?"
"Get used to disappointment"
Conversations that move from prose towards poetry—
alliteration, rhythm, hyperbole
"Thank God for the guts and the gristle"
"Putting on down to Gourda"
"Gone, Garfield, gone. . ."

—thanks to the Dargan, Hunter, Luckey, and Fugar families

The Tenderness of Swine

Like Lords of the Manor,
my brother and I greet one another—"Yo Sire"
and when someone asked, "why?"
Murray answered: "respect."
And so my brother and I refined our communication
into a work of art

but so did my children who call each other, "Swine,
Hey Swine,"
and when they're aggravated, "Swineherd."
with delicious disrespect

yet no one's dissin' anyone
just as black guys use nigga—
for respectful disrespect,
and gays claim queer
as a playful caress.

For love can get inside a word
subvert the prejudice
bring out the tenderness
of swine

from *Lost in Redskirt Forest*

Some Useful Information on Characters and Other Things

Don Wolfe—A Jewish American teenage boy

Eugene Youngblood—A Native American teenage boy

Miiko Akito—A Japanese American teenage girl

Dennis Akito—Miiko's brother

Edna Otika—Miiko's cousin

Trixie—Don Wolfe's female pet dog, a Schnauzer

Peter—Don Wolfe's baby brother

Grubsnig—A giant and a BIG businessman who runs a sleazy child pornography empire

Horigron—Where Grubsnig lives with his wife and child

Mrs. Grubsnig—The giant Grubsnig's wife

Hefner Grubsnig—The baby boy of the Grubsnigs and quite a huge Hefner

Barrie, the toll king—A troll who collects tolls from those trying to enter into Horigron

Palindromes—Usually a group of numbers or words that when read forwards or backwards spells out the exact same thing

Redskirt Forest—Where the story takes place and the misspelling of "trickster" when spelled backwards ("Triksder")

BANZAI is a little-known mystical Oriental board game popular among Oriental schoolchildren who excel at it. This ancient board game of strategy and skill has had an underground, secretive existence and following since its origin in the Orient centuries ago, but it is relatively unknown in the United States and among the western nations of the world. As a game of great antiquity and mystery, it is believed by Oriental cultures to hold the secret of the control of all powers in the universe: If you master the game, you can master anyone and any power at any time. Conversely, no man or any power can ever control you. You are a true "Master of the Universe."

Chapter Six
The Awful Giant Grubsnig

An awful giant named Grubsnig lived at the huge castle in Horigron with his wife and baby boy. Grubsnig must have been at least twelve feet tall and was as mean as he was ugly. Mrs. Grubsnig and baby Grubsnig were pretty big, ugly, and mean too. But they were not as awful as the great Grubsnig himself. In fact, all the people of Horigron were pretty big, ugly, and mean, or so they say. It was a whole town of giants. Some even say that the town got its name from the melding together of the

two words “horrible” “and grown-ups.” And after all, who could be more “grown-up” than giants?

As the three children approached the huge castle on the other side of the wooden walkway, having crossed the colossal lake, the gates of the massive fortress swung open mysteriously, and Miiko, Eugene, and Don entered the dark, forbidding abode slowly and cautiously. But the door shut quickly behind them, leaving them locked within. The noise of the slamming gates startled the three, striking fear in their hearts. They were now trapped inside, and they did not know how they were going to get back out.

A huge voice cleared rather loudly and coughed three times, shaking the castle walls with immense force. The walls of the mansion reverberated and shook each time. The frightened youngsters heard a deep, booming voice ring out:

“Fee, fie, foe . . . what fun!
I smell the blood of three children!
Oriental, Indian, and Jew—
Why, I’ll smash them all with my shoe!

Better yet, these prisoners three:
A girl, two boys . . . now I see—
I’ll abuse them here most awfully
By using them in child pornography!”

Huge footsteps came clomp, clomp, clomping down the hallway, and the great Grubsnig himself soon appeared from around the very corner of the castle hallway in which the three brave teenagers stood trembling with fear. But they did not stand there trembling for very long! In a flash, at the first sight of the awful giant, they ran off down the narrow and winding hallway leading to nowhere in particular.

“Halt! Halt, I say!” Grubsnig screamed, shaking the very foundation of the palace as he pursued them doggedly through the curving corridor. “I’m Grubsnig the giant, and I demand that you stop immediately, or I’ll smash you all to tiny little bits and bones, even smaller than you already are right now!”

The three stopped dead in their tracks. The intimidation had worked. Grubsnig came huffing and puffing and panting from around the corner of the crooked hallway and stood over them, all twelve feet of him.

“Okay, you three hooligans,” he proclaimed loudly. “You have entered my home illegally and unlawfully, and so now you are my prisoners and slaves! Besides, you cannot escape me here. Wherever you hide, I can smell you out and find you easily!”

Grubsnig marched the children to a huge oversized room, which turned out to be baby Grubsnig’s toy room. In it were lots of wrapped, half-wrapped, and unwrapped Christmas presents and toys that were located all across the room. Mrs. Grubsnig joined them there and tied up the three children to the Christmas

tree in the center of the room with ropes, merrily singing Christmas carols and hymns while she worked. She was an eleven-foot, eight-inch Amazon with long, black, curly hair. She could have easily claimed the National Women's Wrestling Association Championship back home in Nebraska.

"Oh baby Grubsnig will love having human toys to play with this Christmas," Mrs. Grubsnig declared cheerily. "His name is Hefner, Hefner Grubsnig. Isn't he huge? He will surely love playing with you children. He loves real lifelike dolls with actual real working human parts."

The children gasped in horror at this thought but felt even worse after Grubsnig himself interrupted his wife with his own evil plans for them.

"O NO, the baby cannot play with these three until I get through with them. I will strip them naked, take photographs and videos of them in every conceivable position imaginable, and sell these products for enormous profits. This will be the most lucrative phenomenon of my entire pornography publishing business this year—ethnics are in! That damn troll king hasn't been letting many through these parts lately!"

Don could not believe that this was happening and that these remarks were being said. Here was a prominent, successful, and wealthy businessman, a giant in the Horigron business community, who was rich enough to live in a huge castle, religious enough to be celebrating Christmas, family-oriented enough to have a wife and his very own child, and yet corrupt enough to be talking about using innocent children as victims in a child pornography ring of some kind that featured nude photos and probably much worse. Values seemed to be rather backwards here in Horigron! Mrs. Grubsnig seemed nicer than Don had expected. Even as she was tying the three children to the Christmas tree, she chattered happily about all the nice toys and wonderful presents for baby Grubsnig and her husband. What a shame they would not get a chance to enjoy playing with these special gifts themselves. They were so useful. Don listened and watched spellbound as Mrs. Grubsnig described the magical items, wondering all the while whether he would ever escape from the giant's evil clutches alive.

"Why, here is the baby rattle that can change to different sizes and weights as the baby grows," lady Grubsnig declared. "And over there is the wristwatch that controls time, for my husband. Over here is the sack with my secret present in it, but I already know what it is—the goose that lays the golden eggs! And right over there is the magical lyre. Each of these gifts has special powers and comes with complete instructions."

After finishing her joyful holiday braggadocio, Mrs. Grubsnig departed from baby Grubsnig's toy room, leaving the three frightened teenagers locked in and all alone to contemplate their fate. Her large clomping footsteps could be heard stomp, stomp, stomping off in the distance.

"What are we going to do?" Eugene queried, breaking the silence. "My arms are tied together so tightly, I can't reach my knife from inside my belt so that I can cut myself loose!"

Don kept staring at the presents strewn across the room, scheming, plotting, thinking, and planning. What was going to be the next move?

Miiko laughed. "This will be easy," she said, freeing her hands. "Where did you say that knife was?"

"How did you do that?" Eugene asked, gesturing with his eyes to the bulge inside his belt.

"No problem—old Japanese trick!" Miiko replied. "You just stiffen out so that when your captor thinks he is tying you up real tightly, it is actually a loose fit once you relax all of your muscles! And besides, did you notice that this isn't really rope at all—it's actually wrapping ribbon, giant-size! Even though it's thicker than most ribbon that we use, it still does not really have the strength that rope has!"

In a flash, Miiko retrieved Eugene's knife and quickly cut away the thick ribbons holding Eugene and Don prisoners. They all stood up together, freed from the restrictive bonds that held them captive only moments ago.

"Now what?" Eugene mused out loud. "What are we going to do now?"

"I think that the answer to that question lies in these presents," Don replied uncertainly. "Mrs. Grubsnig said they were magical, that some of them had special powers . . . So maybe, just maybe they can be useful in helping us get out of here!"

"I don't know, Don," Miiko protested. "They are all so big and heavy for one thing. And we will need a lot more than magic to get out of this place alive! This guy is more dangerous than I had thought originally. Let's think about a really, really good plan . . . But, for now, if they come back here in this room anytime real soon, we will surely hear their loud giant footsteps, in which case we will need to cluster up back at the tree again quickly and pretend that we are still all tied up! Are we agreed?"

"Good idea," Eugene interjected. "Meanwhile, let's look around and see what we can use to get out of here!"

The three split up in the large room. Eugene searched for weapons; Miiko looked for possible escape routes; Don ran over to examine the presents. He was totally obsessed with them and the idea that they were the keys to freedom.

First, there was the baby rattle. It was just like the one he had stolen from the Five-and-Ten Store for his brother, Peter, only this one was as huge as a normal-sized weight lifter's dumbbell.

On the left near the center was an *L* for "left" and an arrow pointing downward. On the right was an *R* for "right" and an arrow pointing upward. Attached to the side was a tag with writing on it. It read:

"Twist me to the right—
Pull me out, I'll be light!
Twist me to the left—
Push me in, I've got heft!"

Don tried it. But when he twisted the right side of the toy to the right, the rattle pulled out and got longer, becoming as heavy and as long as a super heavyweight's

barbell. And when he twisted the left side to the left, the rattle pushed in and got shorter, becoming lighter and lighter until it was the weight of a feather.

“AH HA,” thought Don. “I must remember that this contraption works backwards. It will make a great toy for Peter or maybe even Trixie. But also, I can use it to become the strongest, most powerful man on earth . . . or, at least seem that I am!”

Don moved over to the giant’s wristwatch. It looked more like a huge kitchen clock on a thick strap.

Attached to it was another instructional tag that read:

“Turn my hands counterclockwise:
The past will then soon materialize;
But turn my hands the proper way:
And the future is today!”

“Oh,” Don declared. “How neat! This is a time machine—what a rare find! With this treasure I could stay young forever and have the time and the freedom to realize any dream!”

This was all so amazing! Don approached a third mystery gift. This one was a burlap bag, and inside it was the goose that lays the golden eggs. The goose had a tag on its foot that read as follows:

“Golden eggs I can lay—
All night and all day;
But tuck me in this sack real deep—
I’ll think it’s night and go to sleep!”

“Great!” Don thought selfishly. “With this I could be the wealthiest and most influential man on the whole earth and buy anything I want anytime I want it!”

Don also noticed that there were some golden eggs already in the sack, so apparently the goose would still lay them while in there. The sack was actually quite huge and could probably hold all of the gifts found in the room all at the same time.

Finally, Don’s eyes turned to the beautiful, shiny, magical lyre. Like all the other items, it had a tag attached to one of its curved ears that spelled out the following:

“Twang hard the strings on this magical lyre,
And a rousing tune will soon transpire;
Twang softly and the sound, to say the very least,
Twill soothe the soul of any savage beast!”

Gosh, with this gift in my possession,” Don mused, “I could become the most famous, most creative person in the whole world! Fame and fortune would be at my very fingertips—music would be my life and my career!”

The sound of Miiko’s voice broke Don’s spell and his fleeting reveries.

“Quick, guys,” she whispered loudly. “I think I have found an escape hatch out of this room and maybe even out of the giant’s castle altogether. This heating duct surely leads out of here!”

Eugene ran over immediately to investigate, and upon careful inspection, confirmed its potential as a ticket out of the awful giant Grubsnig's huge castle and the general release from their imprisonment within.

"I've found no great weapons," Eugene announced. "But, if we each stuff some of these huge Christmas tree balls in our pockets, we can throw them under the giant's feet whenever he is chasing us again. They will trip him just as surely as marbles would trip us!"

Don was slow to respond to the excitement being generated by his two colleagues. He did not really want to part with the giant's treasures during their escape attempt.

"Oh, leave those things alone, Don," Miiko affirmed angrily. "Those things are not ours to take anyway, and besides, how could we escape and still haul all of that junk out of here?"

The answer to this question stared Don directly in the face. There was a tag hanging from the drawstrings of the burlap sack that he had not noticed previously. It indicated that the sack was imported from another country and was, therefore, not a native Horigron product. It read:

"I'm an ordinary burlap sack—
Carry me right on your back.
When I'm empty, I'm as heavy as can be;
When I'm full, a feather is lighter than me!"

Before Don could explain, Miiko and Eugene had loaded up their pockets and stuffed their shirts with the huge Christmas tree balls and were getting ready to leave the room in a hurry. Don began stuffing all the newfound treasures into the huge sack and, sure enough, just as he had surmised, although the treasures were collectively heavy, his burden was light. It worked exactly like the tag had said—perhaps the instructions were not backwards because it was an import from a normal country! All the other items were more like the giant baby's rattle and the general moral and ethical values found here in Horigron! With this unique sack, he could always have a light load to carry, a leisurely existence, and would never ever have to work very hard for the rest of his life!

"Come on, Don!" Eugene implored. "We are getting ready to leave! You won't be needing all that junk!"

Don scrambled over to the heating duct where Eugene had removed the cover. Looking like a young Santa Claus with an overstuffed bag of gifts flung over his back, Don did not mind taking the risk involved. And besides, the duct was plenty big enough for all three of them to walk through comfortably, winding their collective way through the maze of gigantic pipes and ventilation grills on the way to freedom. Don struggled with the sack at first because it was huge, clumsy, and dragged along awkwardly behind him. But, other than that, it was as light as a feather.

After circulating through what seemed like a mile long curvy tunnel, Eugene, who led the way in the manner of earlier generations of nomadic hunters and tribal

chiefs, discovered an opening in one of the vents. With a quick turn of a screen, the three daring kids found themselves outside the duct system. But, lo and behold, they were still inside the giant's castle in a long, winding hallway. They could hear Grubsnig breathing heavily, as well as the huge family dog, which was as large as a brown grizzly bear, growling nearby.

"Quick!" whispered Miiko. "Let's get out of here!"

The three of them ran as fast as their little legs could carry them down the gigantic curving hallway toward what they hoped would eventually lead them to the front door of the castle. The giant's huge dog, with its long, brown hair and razor sharp teeth, and Grubsnig, himself, smelled them out with their keen olfactory sense and pursued them through the castle corridors with humongous stomping giant steps.

"Hurry up, Don!" Eugene ordered. "Let's get a move on!"

Miiko and Eugene threw out a steady stream of the round Christmas tree ornaments they had collected toward the giant and his faithful dog companion. This plan worked out nicely because, just as Eugene had explained it, the large round balls acted like marbles, causing the giant and dog to trip over each other time and time again. Over and over they fell and rolled about endlessly, asses over tin cups, on these slippery circular impediments to their victory in the chase. In all ways, they tripped through the hallways, amazed and dazed, abused and confused, always amusing, always amazing, for those who observed the absurd. Our heroes watched in utter amazement.

For a while, the three prisoners were far ahead of their pursuers, but the hallway was a lot longer than they had anticipated. They could not figure out exactly how to escape from this palace prison. The place was a virtual never-ending series of long, windy corridors in the form of a giant rat's maze, just as if they were a part of some kind of bizarre human experiment in the giant's psychology laboratory of horror!

"Amazing!" cried Miiko. "We always seem to come to more and more hallways!"

Before long, the two giant figures caught up to the children easily, and Don was beginning to trip repeatedly over the sack he was carrying awkwardly behind him, dragging as it was, slowing him down considerably.

"Quick, do something, Don!" Miiko pleaded. "You are closest to them. Use something from your clumsy bag of tricks!"

No sooner than the little Japanese girl had spoken, Don tripped over the sack and the lyre fell out. Grubsnig and his dog were almost on top of them now, breathing down their necks. Quickly, Don began plucking hard on the magical strings and a beautiful tune was heard ringing throughout the palace corridors.

The three children watched with amazement as Grubsnig and his bear-sized canine stopped dead in their tracks and began to laugh and dance to the lyre's hypnotizing melody. This continued for quite a few minutes.

Don stopped playing and stuffed the lyre back into the sack so that the three of them could continue their escape. The tactic had stalled their enemies for a short period of time, but very soon after the music had stopped playing, the two Goliaths

were once again in hot pursuit. The thump, thump, thumping of their footsteps could be heard throughout the castle.

"Drop that bag of tricks, Don, for God's sake!" Eugene yelled back at him. "It can't possibly help us anymore!"

"No, no! Please trust me!" Don protested strongly and stubbornly, just like his famous fictional predecessor, Jack, from the old traditional folktales that bore his name. "It helped us once, and it will help us again. You'll see. We'll get out of here safely . . . Look . . . over there. There's a door leading out of here straight ahead!"

All three reached the castle door in a flash. Eugene was the leader. Next came Miiko. And Don brought up the rear. It looked like they had finally made it.

"Goodbye, Grubsnig!" Eugene yelled.

"So long, Mr. Giant!" Miiko shouted.

"Adios, big dog!" Don cried out.

Eugene pulled open the huge door and all three of them ran out—straight into the waiting arms of Mrs. Grubsnig!

"HAH!" laughed a very out-of-breath, heavily breathing Mr. Grubsnig, arriving at the scene wheezing and clearing his throat. "You are still my prisoners, and I am still your caretaker!"

Grubsnig held back his huge dog, just barely, as Mrs. Grubsnig carried all three of the prisoners back to baby Grubsnig's toy room where she tied them up once again, only this time she used rolls and rolls of thick red tape left over from the Christmas gift-wrapping. It was much too tight for Miiko to use her special "old Japanese trick" or any other trick for that matter. The giant's dog got much too close to her during this bondage ordeal, however, and Miiko, in her anger and frustration, was able to deliver a tremendous karate kick to the nose while one of her legs was still free. Unbelievable as it may seem, the gigantic dog whimpered and cried for a moment, then turned around and ran away in fear, and was never ever seen by the youngsters ever again anymore.

"What exactly are you really going to do with us, Mr. Giant?" Miiko demanded. "More importantly, what did you do with my brother Dennis when he got lost here in Horigron right near your castle?"

"DENNIS SINNED!" the giant replied curtly. "Say that backwards!"

"And what about my cousin Edna?" Miiko challenged her captor once again. "What did you do to her, big man?"

"DENNIS AND EDNA SINNED!" was the giant's mysterious response. "Try saying that backwards."

"You've got that all backwards is right," Miiko protested. "They were both very good people!"

"No, that's not the point," the giant argued. "Just say that backwards!"

Don was beginning to comprehend what the giant was trying to say. He quickly turned to Miiko.

"What was your cousin's last name?" Don asked his Japanese friend. "Was it the same as yours?"

“No, my last name is Akito,” Miiko responded. “Her last name was Otika. But why do you ask me this question now?”

“Don’t you see? Don’t you get it?” Don blurted out. “They are both dead and buried. He killed them! Why, I spotted their single tombstone just after Eugene and I crossed over the troll’s bridge to get here and right before we met you! It said: ‘DENNIS AKITO AND EDNA OTIKA SINNED!’ And that reads the same way backwards as it does forwards!”

“Well, then, that also explains the sign we saw in the woods that said ‘STEP ON NO PETS!’” Eugene exclaimed.

“Right . . . and don’t forget the troll, Barrie, the toll king, and his badge which said ‘GATEMAN’S NAME TAG,’” Don explained. “All those phrases also read backwards the same way as they read forwards! Why, this whole place is turned around backwards! Even the baby’s rattle and the magical lyre worked in the reverse way they were supposed to according to the instructions. I should have twanged it softly, but instead I twanged it hard!”

“Why, you rat!” Miiko shouted at the giant. “You killed my kin! But I challenge you to your own game!”

“AHA, little princess, do you palindrome?” the giant asked politely. “If you can create one longer than I can, I’ll let you go free!”

“You vile murderer,” Miiko shrieked. “You must let all three of us go free if I win. Then, and only then, is it a deal! Go ahead, giant. You start first, and I’ll still beat you!”

The giant nodded in passive agreement to Miiko’s proposal and began the contest. Here’s how it went:

Giant:	“A DOG, A PAGODA!”
Miiko:	“A DOG, A PAW, A PAGODA!”
Giant:	“A DOG, A PAW, A LAW, A PAGODA!”
Miiko:	“A DOG, A PAW, A LAD, A LAW, A PAGODA!”
Giant (uneasily):	“A DOG, A PAW, A LAD, A FAD, A LAW, A PAGODA!”
Miiko (confidently):	“A DOG, A PAW, A LAD, A FAN, A FAD, A LAW, A PAGODA!”
Giant (hesitating):	“A DOG, A PAW, A LAD, A FAN, A MAN, A FAD, A LAW, A PAGODA! Surely you can’t beat that!”
Miiko:	“A DOG, A PAW, A LAD, A FAN, A MAT, A MAN, A FAD, A LAW, A PAGODA!”
Giant:	(stony silence and consternation).
Miiko:	“AHA . . . I’ve beaten you. And here’s another one—A DOG, A PAW, A LAD, A FAN, A MAT, A CAT, A MAN, A FAD, A LAW, A PAGODA!”

Sure enough, Miiko had beaten the giant at his own favorite word game. She, too, had grown up in a family where words were carefully chosen and considered

sacred. But unlike Grubsnig, she had not perverted or compromised her love for the English language by writing pornographic magazine copy and establishing a lucrative but morally corrupt publishing empire that used and abused people, particularly juveniles like her brother, her cousin, and her. Instead, Miiko and her kin were more apt to compose marvelous haiku poetry about the beautiful mysteries of the universe.

Eugene could also appreciate the victory. In his particular Indian tribe, they lived by the oral storytelling skills of the master raconteurs. His living Bible was a running commentary of tales, myths, and legends that his grandfather passed on to each of his sons and grandsons. Every night they told the sacred stories and kept the culture alive for yet another generation. So, too, did this rich storytelling tradition exist in the Akito and Wolfe families with their respective proud ethnic heritages.

Grubsnig untied and untaped the three youths reluctantly. He was beaten fairly and squarely and he knew it. Being a man of his word, and certainly only a big man was capable of such integrity, he mumbled something barely audible out of the corner of his mouth as he let his three prisoners free.

"This is going to cost me a lot of revenue this year, you know, letting you three go just like that," Grubsnig sneered. "I could have made an awful lot of money—megabucks, megaprofits—hawking your talents in the marketplace. After all, I have my corporate industrial image to maintain. And besides, my castle is almost completely paid off now, too!"

The three new escapees wasted no time. Once again, they found themselves exploring the giant's confusing but grandiose domicile. They certainly did not want to wait around any longer in case Grubsnig changed his mind again. Off they ran, straight for the same door that was nearly their escape route the last time, until Mrs. Grubsnig interfered. Sure enough, it was the palace entrance as they had surmised correctly previously, but they would still have a long way to travel across the long plank pathway that led from the castle grounds across the colossal lake and back into the heart of the mysterious Redskirt Forest. They started across the walkway.

Don did not forget to take his huge sack of gifts with him without the giant even taking notice of it. These treasures were as light as a feather on his back, just like the tag on the burlap sack had promised. But the sack's size did still make swift passage a bit uncomfortable, since it tended to drag along behind him, making him susceptible to tripping.

"Why don't you drop that sack?" Eugene warned. "If the giant ever finds out that his special gifts, like that lyre, are missing, he is sure to become very unhappy and try to capture us again!"

Even before all Eugene's words were completely spoken, the three heard a great roar off in the distance behind them. Grubsnig had obviously just discovered that his special treasures, his magical means of controlling the world, were missing! He came running after the three children as fast as his clumsy huge legs would

carry him. As big as he was, he was very fast because he would take real long giant steps as he ran. He was even beginning to close in on the troublesome trio. They were almost one-half a mile away, but if they did not act really fast once again, the thieves would probably be caught and tied up a third time. This time it would surely be for good. There would be no getting loose, no possible escape whatsoever if they were caught this time!

Pound, pound, pound! Clomp, clomp, clomp! Thump, thump, thump! Stamp, stamp, stamp! Grubsnig's footsteps came crashing down on the wooden planks of the walkway, shaking the bridge over troubled waters at every step he took. The three brave children could hear the giant's familiar wheezing, coughing, and habit of clearing his throat every time he made a loud announcement. All of this made the bridge tremble and shake, causing our heroes to lose their balance and footing more than once. But Grubsnig was getting closer and closer.

"Stop thieves!" Grubsnig cried as he approached the frightened youngsters, nearer and nearer, closing in fast.

"Quick. Do something!" Eugene shouted from the lead escape position. "Throw back the sack, Don!"

"Let's talk this over, Grubsnig!" Miiko pleaded from the middle position. "We can palindrome again or compete in the ancient Japanese game of BANZAI if you prefer . . . but you must first promise to let my two friends go free!"

"No deal!" the giant shouted back. "You don't play fair! This time I will be sure to kill you all!"

"I'll wrestle you in a fair fight," Eugene offered desperately. "Or . . . we can compete in Indian lacrosse . . . if you first let my two friends go free. I'm not afraid of you!"

"Never!" the giant answered stubbornly. "If you are not afraid, then why do you run from me? Stop, stop, I say."

Suddenly, the giant began chanting a rhyme even as he ran:

I'm the great Grubsnig,
I'll smash all your bones;
I'll crush you to pieces,
With sticks and sharp stones!
I'll fix you three scoundrels
So you can't tell the tale
Of how this clever giant
Ever let you out of jail!"

It was raining outside, just as it had been when they first approached the giant's mansion. A slow and steady, slippery and slushy rain was falling. Perhaps their only hope was that the giant would slip, fall, and hurt himself on the long bridge, losing his footing in the rain before they did. Or, if they could ever make it back into the forest again, perhaps the heavy weight of the giant's body would sink him into the dampened forest floor just like it was quicksand. But right now, this all seemed so unlikely.

Grubsnig was in hot pursuit, and there was hardly any distance between the pursuer and the pursued. There was just enough time for one last desperate plan of action.

Don was the slowest of the three escapees and in the rear position because he was dragging the huge sack of special gifts behind him while on the lam. Don knew well that he would have to part with one of the great stolen treasures in order to get out of this mess. He reached down deep into the bag and pulled out the huge dumbbell rattle. It was short and light at the moment, but would be perfect for their escape efforts. He twisted it to the right and pulled the handle out until it was barbell-sized. At this point, it became so heavy that it dropped out of Don's hands and rolled back toward the giant along the vast wooden bridge leading from the castle to the forest. It got heavier and heavier and longer and longer as it rolled. The giant saw it coming and his only chance of avoiding it was to jump over it or it would mow him down like pins on a bowling alley. As he got ready to jump over the hurtling barbell/rattle, it smashed a gigantic hole in the wooden bridge. The giant leaped, but it was too late. The hole was humongous, and the giant landed right into the gaping abyss the barbell created, falling, falling, plunging downward into the colossal lake along with the monstrous toy, which, in turn, sucked Grubsnig under like a powerful maelstrom.

"Save me! Help me!" Grubsnig screamed at the top of his lung capacity as he bobbed to the surface over and over again, time and again, until the three startled teenagers could finally see him no more! He sank like the Titanic.

"Great!" exclaimed Miiko. "Don has sure rattled that giant! He has sunk into the lake!"

"Fantastic!" declared Eugene. "He certainly won't bother us anymore!"

"Damn!" said Don. "The rattle is lost for good. No toy for Peter or Trixie. And now, I can never ever be the strongest and most powerful person on earth after all!"

"Yes, but look at all the great treasures you have left!" Miiko reminded her friend.

"And we will always be grateful to you for saving our lives, Don," Eugene added. "You have earned the right to all those treasures. Perhaps we had been wrong to continually chastise you about carrying them with you during our escape. Perhaps each one of the remaining treasures will serve to get you out of a sticky situation like escaping from the giant's evil clutches, just as the giant baby's rattle did for us this time!"

Don was glad that Eugene had taken such a generous and magnanimous attitude. Even though he had saved the day purely by accident this time, Don had not really wanted to share the stolen treasures with anyone else like he feared he might have to, since sharing the spoils of war seemed like the only fair thing to do. The three heroes finally reached the edge of the woods together with no further incidents, but decided quickly to part company so that each one of them could continue on his or her own path, fulfilling the cultural identity and quest each had started individually. . . .